

Text: 1 Peter 4:7-11

Title: Generosity

Location: Community Presbyterian Church, Celebration, FL

Preacher: Ashley Bingle for Youth Sunday

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My name is Ashley Bingle. I am a ready to graduate this year after being homeschooled my whole life. I have been attending CommPres since before my 10 year old sister was born. Ever since I entered ninth grade, I have been a part of the Youth Worship Band, and the Student Leadership team.

It is quite an honor to preach the Youth Sunday sermon. But when I originally agreed to do it I thought I would get to pick my own topic. Instead, I get to preach on an easy (sarcasm) topic...Stewardship (eye roll). [Stewardship slide] Being a young person who doesn't have much experience with money, I don't have a job, I don't even have an allowance, I set out to research as much as I could about the subject. I found that stewardship is a lot more than just giving money to the church.

According to the dictionary, a "Steward" is a person who has been entrusted with something of value. For example, servers are entrusted with customers to feed. Hotel workers are entrusted with rooms to keep clean. Cruise ship attendants are entrusted with towels to fold into funny animals while you are out. (I still don't know how they do that ostrich!) Other valuable things include our health, our family, our money, our abilities, and the one thing we can't ever get back...time. There are good stewards and bad stewards depending on how the valuables are handled.

Some would say that a steward is the same as a server. Peter asserts this similarity in his first letter, as we will see in our text today. Turn with me to 1 Peter 4:7-11 or page 859 in your pew bibles.

Background

Scholars believe Peter wrote this epistle shortly before his martyrdom, around 64 or 65 AD. During this time, there was persecution going on against Christians. Especially in the nations Peter names as his recipients: Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Bithynia, and Asia Minor, which are in modern day Turkey.

Peter writes urging Christians to practice good stewardship, not because they can earn salvation, but in gratitude for forgiveness and out of longing to please God and live as an example for others. This is an important point! We should practice good stewardship, not because we can earn salvation, but in gratitude for forgiveness and out of longing to please God.

Our text is 1 Peter 4 verses 7 through 11. Listen for the word of the Lord: (PAUSE)

⁷The end of all things is near; therefore be serious and discipline yourselves for the sake of your prayers. ⁸Above all, maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins. ⁹Be hospitable to one another without complaining. ¹⁰Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received. ¹¹Whoever speaks must

do so as one speaking the very words of God; whoever serves must do so with the strength that God supplies, so that God may be glorified in all things through Jesus Christ. To him belong the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen.

This is the word of the Lord (Thanks be to God)

Dear Heavenly Father, Please speak your message to us today, no matter what I say, and no matter what my age. Show us your truth despite the distractions. In Jesus name, Amen.

I. Stewards LOVE GENEROUSLY [2nd outline page]

A. We get Love!

Love is the root of stewardship. God gives us love. Peter wants us to recognize this love and to be imitators of it by spreading it to others. “We love because he first loved us.” This is the main idea behind the passage, because love is where the rest of the actions come from. Peter states that “love covers a multitude of sins,” but this cannot be confused with God’s direct love for us, which is the reason for our forgiveness from our sins. Rather, when we love one another, we forgive each other and when we forgive one another, we love each other. Our imperfect extension of God’s forgiveness is not a substitute for, nor a supplement to His love, but merely an imitation. We can lead others to Christ and God’s forgiveness when we forgive them using the love He gives us. Just as in this clip from Disney's rendition of The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe, by C.S. Lewis:

[Clip in script] Narnia - Edmund's Return (1:58)

In this movie, Edmund has betrayed not only his brother and sisters, but all of Narnia, and most especially, Aslan the lion. Nevertheless, when he returns his family forgives him and continues to love him. I particularly like Lucy’s enthusiasm, because she is one of the ones he hurt the most. This is the way the apostle Peter urges the church family to act, with love and welcome. “Love keeps no records of wrongs.” As Aslan said, “What’s done is done. There is no need to speak about the past.”

B. We give Love

I have two younger sisters and though I would like to, I won’t say we always get along. I remember, the other day, it was before Dad got home and we were trying to decide what to have for dinner, was it going to be shrimp or chicken? Well the discussion raged and not a few words were spoken in haste and anger, on my side, primarily. Couldn't we just have shrimp tomorrow? I'll pick dinner and you can pick dessert...But you got to pick last night. On and on, finally my mom decided for us. Well, after our dinner, chili, and once we had gone to bed, I remembered something I had forgotten to do. It weighed on my conscience heavily enough that I woke up my sister and told her I was sorry. She had already forgiven me. She followed the rule we have known since we were little, the rule I will remember the rest of my life, to forgive the other person even if they haven't said they're sorry.

God gives us the power to love others in spite of their shortcomings and especially when they haven’t said they’re sorry. We don’t have to love what they have done, but we should still love them all the same.

We should not be stingy with the love we have been given, but all the more generous because it is not ours. We have been given, without any respect to merit, God's love and we have the responsibility to share His love with others by loving them and teaching them about God's love. This joy is something we cannot keep to ourselves.

Peter reminds us that our love should be a “constant love”, an imitation of the unconditional love we enjoy. We share God's love for us and all the other things he has given us. We must be good stewards of God's love.

II. Stewards SHARE GENEROUSLY [3rd outline page] their physical things, their material possessions, their monetary resources

A. We get gifts

Verse 9 is short, but powerful. It urges us to extend a welcome to other believers when they are in need, of a place to stay or a good meal, or even when they are not. Not only has God given us His love, but also has put us in charge of material possessions that we need to use wisely, sharing them with others to build His Kingdom. This generosity with physical Things is the same as generosity with love, as we are urged to do it willingly and cheerfully.

We were out visiting colleges last week. We were touring Lyon College, a very small school in Batesville, Arkansas, where most students are from Arkansas and Oklahoma. My mom was asking a bunch of questions, because it is so far away from home. Where is the nearest airport? Is there a place to store stuff over the summer? What do kids do when they can't come home for Thanksgiving? “I don't know,” the student tour guide from Batesville answered, with her lovely Arkansan accent. “I'd take her home with me!”

B. We give gifts

We give our gifts to others when we offer hospitality. While reading through different translations of this verse, I found many different things we are warned against doing while practicing our hospitality. Complaining, grumbling, murmuring, muttering, secret debate, secret displeasure. But my favorite I found in my Grandpa's copy of “Letters to Young Churches”, a translation by J. B. Phillips: “Be hospitable to each other without secretly wishing you hadn't got to be!” This statement really hits home and all the other versions have the same tone. Hospitality should be offered without a sense of duty or compulsion but not without willingness. Hospitality literally is generosity, so it follows easily that when we share anything it ought to be generously, over-abundantly, and joyfully.

Did you hear about the little girl who was given a quarter and a dollar by her mother? Her mother was hoping to teach her a life lesson, so she said the girl could put whichever one in the offering plate that she wanted to, and keep the other for herself. After the service, her mother asked, “which one did you put in?” expecting she had learned her lesson in generosity and had put in the dollar. The little girl answered, “Well, I was going to put the dollar in, but that man in the pulpit kept talking about cheerful givers and I knew I would be a lot more cheerful if I put the quarter in, so I did.”

III. Stewards SERVE GENEROUSLY [4th outline page] using their time and talents

A. We are served

Now, listen again to verse 10: "Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received." Did you hear it? God calls us to be stewards by serving others with our gifts. Service and stewardship are very nearly the same thing. In bible times a steward was often a freed slave who had been given responsibility for the master's household and was charged with administering his belongings to his servants or even his children who had not yet come of age.

This is a wonderful description of our place in God's Kingdom. Jesus Christ has freed us from our slavery to sin. We are in the employ of a gracious Master, managing His affairs as faithful, trusted servants. We administer what he has entrusted to us, to his servants and children. Stewards are honored because they have been trusted with so much, but they still serve even the lowest servants.

If you have ever been on a cruise you will probably have seen generosity and enthusiasm in some part of the crew. On my last trip, not only our servers were familiar with us, but Cearcy, the Ice Cream Man could recognize us. He would have our favorite flavor of ice cream ready for us when he saw us coming. (We visited there a lot). One of my friends had the most famous server on the ship, Superman. Superman could do anything! Everybody knew his name and it seemed like he knew everybody's name. When my grandma's hand was injured, our server chopped her food for her... and fed it to her! [Waiter Picture] Now bringing people food is part of the job, but these servers went above and beyond the call of duty.

It is in our job description to serve also. [4th outline page] These people are what Christians ought to look like. Each of us is specially suited to his or her task, and accomplishes it well. As all gifts are needed to serve a meal, they are needed to serve Christ. As we use our Master's resources to show His hospitality to others, we should be enthusiastic and serve them with all we have to offer.

B. We serve others

The Greek word dee-ak-on-eh'-o or dē-ä-ko-ne'-ō {διακονοῦντες, διακονέω,ν} means to be a servant or attendant, to wait a table and offer food and drink to guests, to minister to someone, to relieve someone's necessities.

We minister and help others, passing on to them the most bare necessity of God's love. We wait on them, offering the bread of life and living water. We really are supposed to bring our gifts to the Lord's Table, humbly, as servants our Lord and one another. We need to use our gifts to build the church in the present time and for the future. The best investment that can be made is in the preparation of the next generation. And that generation must learn to love and share and serve.

Last year I went on a Student Leadership Retreat. We went to Southwind Ocala, the same place as our MidHigh Great Escape Summer Camp. The deal we had with the camp, was that we would serve in the kitchen and dinning room, in exchange for being able to use the facility for our retreat. The irony was that the group we were serving did our jobs at Great Escape. We were serving the same people who had served us. If you have ever seen teenagers in a kitchen [Student Leadership Retreat Picture] you have a good idea how well it was going for us. (Not so well.) I'm

not sure how Kool-Aid got six feet high on the wall, but it did. To put it bluntly, we weren't very good. The people we were serving knew more about what we were doing than we did. At one point a man entered the kitchen to get cream and sugar for his coffee, tired of waiting for us to notice we needed to bring more out. We learned how to serve with all of our resources, as we brought food and drinks from the kitchen and labor and time from our gifts. We had each been granted the able bodies and open schedules from God just as we had been given trays full of food from the cooks.

[4th outline page] God has given all of us many blessings and we should use those to bless others. When we give of our time we are serving others with our gift of opportunity. When we give of our knowledge we are serving others with our gift of experience. When we give of our labor we are serving others with our gift of strength. When we give of our money we are serving others with our gift of capital. Stewardship is generosity.

Conclusion

If you walk out of the sanctuary today and the only thing you remember is that I had chili for dinner the other night, you'll probably be disappointed and so will I. So try to remember this instead. We were given much, and we are charged to pass on what we have received, by loving generously, sharing generously, and serving generously.

As the story goes, a group of young businessmen were attending a conference just before Christmas, and on their way back, they were delayed in security at the airport. In their mad rush to catch their plane they knocked over a produce stand full of apples. The men, headless of the damage they had caused, managed to reach the gate in time. As they were about to board, one man felt compassion and told his friends to go on without him. He would catch the next flight.

He returned to the stall. The proprietor was fumbling around on the ground trying to retrieve her apples from under the feet of passers-by. The girl was completely blind and the people moving past her ruined stall were similarly blind to her plight. The man stopped, got down on his knees, and collected her apples for her. Noticing some were bruised, he set them aside, and paid for them out of his own wallet. "I hope we haven't made your day too bad," he said.

As he left to try and get on the standby list for another flight, she called after him, "Mister..." He turned back. "Are you Jesus?"

This man took compassion on the girl. He gave out of what he had been given. He loved. He shared. He served. Could you be mistaken for Jesus?

"Freely you have received, freely give." Will you bring your gifts to the table? Let's pray: Dear Heavenly Father, You have given us so much. Teach us how we can use our blessings to bless others. May we always strive to imitate your example of generosity in everything we do and in everything we are. In Jesus name, Amen.